

Cancun Conference moves into small group “consultations”

Cancun, 9 December (Meena Raman) – A small group of about 50 delegations was convened in the afternoon of Wednesday 8 December by the Presidency of the UNFCCC talks being held here in Cancun in a process termed “informal consultations under the Presidency.”

The group later broke up for smaller meetings on specific issues (mitigation, finance, adaptation, legal form), and reconvened twice to hear reporting back on these specific-issues discussions. The meetings went on until 1 a.m. early on Thursday.

Earlier, the President of the 16th Conference of Parties (COP) and of the 6th COP acting as the Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP), Patricia Espinosa (Foreign Minister of Mexico), told an informal plenary of all members that she expected an outcome document to be ready by Friday morning, and that the meetings would conclude in time by Friday 6 p.m.

Wednesday (8 December) began with the holding of two early morning informal stocktaking plenary meetings of the COP under the UNFCCC followed by the CMP.

New texts were presented at these two meetings. At the COP meeting, the Chair of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWGLCA) Margaret Mukhanana Sangarwe of Zimbabwe presented a revised note by her (known as CRP3) on elements of the outcome. At the CMP meeting, the Chair of the Ad-hoc Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol (AWGKP) Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda presented a revised Chair's text.

At the COP meeting, the COP President, Patricia Espinosa, announced that at 3 p.m. she would start informal consultations involving Ministers,

the secretariat and the LCA chair, which would help reach compromises to be reflected in the reports of the AWGLCA and the COP. She said a balanced package was not in grasp yet. Referring to CRP3, she said that in some areas there were formulas to reach the understanding and in others options were provided; and in a number of matters, there could be no advance without political guidance. She said that the Mexican Presidency had been carrying out inclusive and transparent consultations and these are in support of the formal negotiations.

[On Sunday, 5 December, the COP President announced some Ministers had been selected to facilitate informal consultations on shared vision, mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology and capacity building. It was clarified that the Ministers will not be expected to draft compromise language, would identify where balance is to be found, and they would not convene informal sessions. Since then, these Ministers (in each topic, one from a developed country and one from a developing country) have been having informal bilateral consultations with various countries and groupings. Some delegates referred to these sessions as “confessionals” in the jargon of the World Trade Organisation, in which Parties are asked by the Ministers to clarify their positions on the issues. Two Ministers were also assigned to facilitate consultations relating to the Kyoto Protocol.]

On the informal consultations, Espinosa said there would be no parallel and overlapping discussions, the positions of all Parties would be taken into account, no group can take decisions in the name of everybody else and Parties can present their views to the consultations. The outcome must be ready by Friday morning. She

closed the COP meeting without opening the floor for questions or comments.

She then convened the informal CMP meeting, made similar remarks to Parties and informed them about the conduct of informal consultations to be held in the afternoon.

After these meetings closed, several delegates were still uncertain about how the informal consultations would be conducted (particularly the 3 pm meeting), who would be invited to take part, how these would affect the work of the drafting groups in the official negotiating process, which documents would be used and whether new documents would emerge in the consultations.

At around 3 pm the small-group meeting (now termed informal consultations) started in a room in the Azteca building of the Moon Palace hotel complex. According to some delegates, it was chaired by Espinosa, and about 40-50 delegations were present, as well as the Chairs of the two AWGs.

A large crowd was seen outside the room pushing to enter, with a developing country delegate saying in exasperation that, “we have been reduced to this to find out from the COP President what is happening”.

There was some confusion as to which countries had been invited. One head of delegation from a developing country said he went to the room before the meeting and was not allowed in. Another delegation which was not invited, heard about the meeting from others who were invited and went into the meeting and took part, even though its name plate was not on the table.

Another country, Bolivia, was invited, and its Ambassador to the UN, Pablo Solon, said at the opening that the process was not inclusive or in line with UN procedures, and said his delegation would not take part in the meeting. At a press conference later in the afternoon, Solon said the informal consultation could not replace the

official negotiating process, but this was now happening because there were hardly any more official meetings taking place, and there was no venue for the 192 countries to negotiate. He called for the resumption of the official negotiations.

At the afternoon meeting of the small group, according to some delegates, the focus was on the issue of the “anchoring of pledges” on mitigation by both developed and developing countries, and finance. In the late afternoon, main meeting was suspended to allow two smaller meetings to be held on finance and on mitigation. Ministers facilitating these two issues were understood to consult and try to come up with drafts of textual language.

It is understood that some of the Ministers that had been assigned the task of consultations suggested that the pledges of Annex I countries, made under the Copenhagen Accord, would be placed in information documents (INF) of both the Convention and the KP, while the pledges of developing countries would also be placed in an INF document. There were various responses to this proposal. Another issue in the consultations was long-term finance, which included the sources of finance. Later the issue of setting up of the new climate fund was also discussed.

The main group convened again at 8 pm to hear reports back on the mitigation and finance consultations. After about an hour and a half, it was suspended again to allow for smaller meetings to be held on various issues, including mitigation, adaptation, finance and legal form of the outcome.

At midnight the main group convened again and for about an hour listened to reporting back on the discussions held on the various issues.

The informal consultations resume at 9 am on Thursday.